

# Center for the Study of the Presidency

## *Announcement*



For Immediate Release  
March 22, 2007

Contact: Ambassador Gary Matthews  
202-872-9800 or [gmatthews@thepresidency.org](mailto:gmatthews@thepresidency.org)

Ambassador David Abshire, President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency (CSP), announced today that the Center would foster a new initiative on the Middle East to obtain better understanding among those countries who share such a common heritage. This initiative is highly appropriate for a Center that studies and applies the lessons of the American Presidency to current and future challenges and opportunities. Ambassador Abshire stated, "Since the days of the Founders, America has been by and large a religious nation and has also offered tolerance among those various religions. Today there is harmony among most Christians, Muslims and Jews in our nation."

The Center's new initiative will be under the direction of former Democratic Congressman Tony Hall, who also served with great distinction as Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture. Ambassador Hall and current Republican Congressman Frank Wolf were instrumental in launching this effort, who together have encouraged interfaith dialogue as a means to solve international conflict for many years. This effort will include a number of prominent lay leaders and clergy.

Ambassador Abshire noted, "While the Holy Land is common to these three religions, which are based on peace and respect, Israel and Palestine are now strife-ridden and a source of contention throughout the Middle East." Abshire also said that the Center's new effort complements Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's renewed efforts to bring about a Palestinian state through its endorsement by the high level Quartet, composed of the United Nations, the European Union, Russia and the United States.

Congressman Wolf—who initiated the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group, which the Center co-sponsored—noted that the Iraq Study Group's report included a recommendation to find a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. With a new diplomatic initiative in the Middle East, Congressman Wolf was instrumental in talking to Secretary Rice and gaining her approval for this new project. With Secretary Rice's backing, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is preparing to make a \$1 million grant to the Center for this effort.

This Center initiative is part of several Center projects on the Middle East, including the establishment of a Foundation for International Understanding to utilize the communications revolution for positive purposes to reach the youth of the world. In addition, the Center also is working to build socio-economic cooperation and dialogue in the Middle East. These projects build on a previous CSP study on U.S.-Muslim communications, which was funded by the Carnegie Corporation, Dr. Scholl Foundation and Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation. Ambassador Gary Matthews, formerly at the U.S. Institute of Peace, serves as the Center's Counselor for Diplomacy and project director. Matthews also served as Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

###